

How long must I wait for a response to my request?

Once a government organization receives your request and the application fee, you are entitled to a response within 30 calendar days.

Will I receive everything I ask for?

Not necessarily. While both *Acts* provide a right of access to most government-held information, exemptions may apply. Exemptions describe circumstances in which the government can refuse to disclose information.

And if access is denied?

If a government organization denies you access to information, it must provide reasons for doing so, in writing, and inform you of your right to appeal the decision to the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Do I have to pay to file an appeal?

Yes, in most cases. If you requested access to your personal information or correction of your personal information, the appeal fee is \$10. The appeal fee related to any other requests for information is \$25. The correct fee must accompany your appeal and may be paid by cheque or money order, payable to "The Minister of Finance."

Is there a time limit for filing an appeal?

Yes. Normally, your appeal must be filed within 30 days of receiving a decision from the government organization.

(For more information on your right to appeal, refer to our brochure, *The Appeal Process and Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner*.)

I have more questions. Who can answer them?

If you have questions of a general nature about access to government-held information or about the freedom of information and protection of privacy *Acts*, please contact an Information Officer in our Communications department.

About the Commissioner

The Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario is appointed by the Ontario Legislature. This independence from the government of the day allows the Commissioner to be impartial when carrying out duties under the *Acts*.

Other brochures available from the Information and Privacy Commissioner:

Your Privacy and Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner

The Appeal Process and Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner

A Mini Guide to Ontario's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

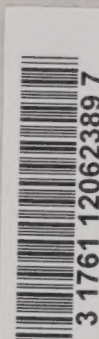
A Mini Guide to Ontario's Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act

For more information, call or write:

Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario
80 Bloor Street West, Suite 1700
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2V1
Toronto: (416) 326-3333 • 1-800-387-0073
Facsimile: (416) 325-9195
TTY: (416) 325-7539
Web site: <http://www.ipc.on.ca>

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

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Access to Information under Ontario's Information and Privacy Acts



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Introduction

Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the provincial *Act*) and *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the municipal *Act*) give you the right to request access to government-held information, including information about you. It is the responsibility of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ensure your right of access is protected.

The following are answers to questions most frequently asked about the right of access to government-held information.

To which government organizations do the Acts apply?

The provincial *Act* came into effect on January 1, 1988. It applies to all provincial ministries and most provincial agencies, boards and commissions, as well as community colleges and district health councils.

The municipal *Act* came into effect January 1, 1991. It applies to local government organizations, including municipalities, school boards, public utilities, transit and police commissions, fire departments, conservation authorities, boards of health and other local boards.

The *Directory of Institutions*, which lists all of the government organizations covered by the *Acts*, can be accessed directly from <www.gov.on.ca/MBS/english/fip/>.

What kind of information may I request?

The *Acts* give everyone a right of access to most recorded information held by government organizations. This information may appear on paper, microfilm or computer disk and includes things like photographs and maps. You also have the right to request access to and correction of government-held personal information about you. Personal information includes your address, sex, age, education and other information about you held by a government organization.

May I use the Acts to request information held by non-governmental organizations?

No. The *Acts* apply only to provincial and local government organizations. They do not apply to private companies, banks, credit bureaus, hospitals, doctors' records or federal government organizations.

Where can I see copies of the Acts?

Copies of the provincial *Act* are generally available for viewing throughout Ontario at the freedom of information offices of all ministries and provincial government organizations. Copies of the municipal *Act* are available in most municipal government offices. Copies of both *Acts* are also available on the IPC's Web site <www.ipc.on.ca>.

If you wish, you may purchase copies of either *Act* by telephoning Publications Ontario, toll free, at 1-800-668-9938.

How do I find out what records provincial and local governments have?

First you need to know whether the information you want is held by a provincial or local government organization.

Provincial Records

A *Directory of Records* is available for viewing online at <www.gov.on.ca/MBS/english/fip/>.

Consult the *Directory of Records* to find out the kinds of records held by ministries and organizations covered by the provincial *Act*. The *Directory* also describes what each organization does, as well as the kinds of general records and personal information kept by these organizations; it also lists addresses of provincial government organizations.

Municipal Records

Municipalities, local boards, agencies and commissions covered by the municipal *Act* have prepared their own directories, which should be available at offices such as city halls, police departments and boards of education.

Okay, I know what information I want how do I ask for it?

You can obtain the information you want, in many cases, just by calling, writing or visiting the appropriate government organization. (If unsure of an address or telephone number, consult the Blue pages in your telephone directory.)

That didn't work — now what?

If you didn't obtain the information you want, make a written freedom of information request.

That sounds complicated. Is it?

Not at all. Simply follow these steps:

Step 1: Complete a request form, or write a letter stating that you are requesting information under one of the two *Acts*. (Request forms are available from government organizations across the province.)

Step 2: Forward the completed request form or letter to the "Freedom of Information and Privacy Co-ordinator" at the government organization most likely to have the information you are looking for. Please note: A \$5 application fee must accompany your request, payable to "The Minister of Finance" (provincial *Act*) or the appropriate local government organization (municipal *Act*).

Are there any other costs?

No fees are charged for the time required to locate and prepare records which contain your personal information. However, you may be charged for photocopying costs. For all other records, you may be charged for photocopying, shipping costs, the time required to locate and prepare the records you've requested, or any other costs associated with replying to your request.